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FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI

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INFO RUEHDL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 001237

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO POTUS TRAVELING PARTY IN MOSCOW.

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: UPDATE ON DEFECTON OF RUSSIAN SOLDIER

REF: TBILISI 1222

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (C) Summary. The Russian soldier who requested asylum from Georgia met with his family in Tbilisi on July 4 and 5. EUMM, UNHCR, along with the Swiss (as the protective power for Russia in Georgia), Georgians and Russians, coordinated these meetings between Artemiev and his family. Artemiev's parents were accompanied to Tbilisi by Russian Commander in South Ossetia Colonel Tarasov (not public, do not disclose), who in turn was escorted by the Gori police chief. After an initial meeting with his parents on July 4, Artemiev decided to return to Russia, but the next day he changed his mind and decided to continue the asylum process. Artemiev is currently staying in a private residence in Tbilisi instead of the regular Ministry of Refugees and Accommodations (MRA) housing, mainly to avoid press stakeouts. EUMM, UNHCR and the Swiss commended all parties, especially the Georgians, for handling the situation fairly. End summary.

¶2. (C) On July 4, Artemiev's parents, accompanied by local commander of Russian forces in South Ossetia Colonel Tarasov, arrived in Tbilisi for a meeting with their son. According to our interlocutors, Artemiev refused to meet with Russian officials, including Tarasov. In the end, the soldier met privately with his parents for about four hours. At the end of the meeting, Artemiev declared he was ready to return to Russia. One of the mediators present convinced him to stay for another night before making any decisions, and UNHCR advised Artemiev that if he did choose to go back, he would need to sign a standard document declaring he was leaving of his own free will.

¶3. (C) Artemiev spent the night at an MRA apartment with his mother, while his father stayed at the Russian interest section. The next day, Artemiev stated that he wanted to stay in Georgia and continue the asylum process. The Russians made one last attempt to change his mind, asking him to meet privately with his father, but he refused to do so, saying that he did not want to be influenced in his decision.

The Swiss Ambassador and the EUMM reported that the parents are divorced and Artemiev had not seen his father for seven years. According to the Swiss, the Russians accepted the outcome.

¶4. (C) UNHCR is providing funding to MRA to accommodate Artemiev in a private residence to mitigate Artemiev being hounded by the press and because normal MRA housing is full. According to EUMM, the Government of Georgia will provide Artemiev with housing and a stipend for four months while the case is adjudicated, and UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation. The Swiss Embassy, in their role as representative of Russian interests in Georgia, continues to assist with communication between the Georgians and Russians.

TEFFT